LETTER FROM THE FRONT TELLS OF THE FIGHTING

Columbia Record.

The magnificent work of the Canadian and Scotch soldiers in resisting the German drive on Ypres receives glowing tributes from Dr. George Benet, a member of the corps of the American ambulance hospital in Paris, in a letter to his brother, Christie Benet, in Columbia.

Dr. Benet attributes the German gain, of about one mile, as being due to the use of asphyxiating gas, which he says is a mixture of chlorine and bromide gases. The French know how to "stick," writes Dr. Benet.

The writer of the following letter, Dr. Benet, was graduated from the medical school at Harvard University. Prior to pursuing medical studies, Dr. Benet attended the University of South Carolina and the University of Virginia. He went to France two months ago.

The latest letter from Dr. Benet was written from Paris under date of May 9. He writes to his brother:

Paris, May 9, Sunday.

For the past ten days the work here has been very heavy, following the German drive on Ypres and Dunkerque, to the north of Paris. They made a desperate attempt to break through the line there, and but for the magnificent work of the Canadians and Scotch, would have succeeded. As it was, they gained one mile, due chiefly to use of asphyxiating bombs (chlorine and bromide gases) against which the Canadians were helpless. While unconscious the Germans rushed forward and brained them with the butts of guns, but were checked finally, so with no ultimate gain. The losses on each side were heavy, and the Canadians were practically wiped out. One of our blesses told me "they do not run, the Canadians." From all I can hear that sums them up. They do not run. But for that matter, the French can show any of them how to stick. The trains bringing wounded into Paris were so crowded toward the middle of the week that our ambulance went direct to Dunkerque over the road, bringing the wounded back in relays. Young Laurence Hemenway, George Denny's brother-in-law, was in the thick of it, with his big Pierce-Arrow ambulance. He told me the sight at Dunkerque was terrible. He is not a doctor, or even a medical student, but he had to give first aid to dozens he found in the streets. He said he was "scared stiff" of the shells at first, but after warming up to the work, soon forgot about them, and hardly heard the banging and smashing. He told of a wild Indian from the "states" who is one of our drivers, and who got there first, whom Hemenway found in the square with his Ford, cheering the shells as they crumpled a house, and estimating which house would get it next. This chap is a curious mixture—he will go anywhere, and do anything, but I don't think he is the type for the work. Hemenway said he took it like some fireworks gotten up for his benefit.

Dr. Greenough and I commandeered one of the hospital roadsters, and with a driver went to La Chapelle toward the middle of the week, to meet one of the hospital trains. There we found our Fords. We were very courteously received by Captain Durier, the artillery officer detailed that week to manage the station. He was on furlough following two months' active service, and I noticed the Legion of Honor modestly pinned inside his breast pocket. This meant he had run right into hell somewhere, and got out. I later learned he pulled his sergeant out of a hot spot, after the latter was down. The captain spoke excellent English, so I got quite a bit of information from him. (Meeting him on the street, you couldn't have told him from Skipper Dan Crawford, so I constantly expected him to call me "George.") The station is composed of a train shed, separated from the receiving rooms by a long black curtain, which adds a very dramatic element. Although handling 700 to 1,000 men a day (at that time) there was absolutely no confusion—no shouting and withal the entire behavior of the place was "dignified," if that describes what I mean. Captain Durier and a French surgeon were in charge, and that means everything. What they said was done, with no back talk, and no suggestions from anyone. The result was, the entire train of 600 badly wounded men were "commissioned" in some four or five hours. Such as were able to walk stepped from the train, passed through the black curtain, and entered the receiving room. His knapsack, etc., were taken and checked. A clerk then took his name, regiment, home address, wife's name and address, and he was passed to a little French surgeon, who hastily examined him, and if his wound was serious, passed him to an excellently equipped dressing room, where a French surgeon and an American nurse (recognized the best in the world) dressed him. He has a card made out here, stating nature of wound and dressing, and he is then turned over to the ambulance drivers of the American hospital, the Japanese hospital or whatnot. With the seriously wounded men, the stretchers are brought in to the receiving room, a hasty examination made, and the man sent at once to a hospital. This in brief is the routine. Captain Durier escorted us over the place, and as I passed one poor devil in a cot he noticed the "American ambulance" on my uniform sleeve. Raising himself, he said in English: "How's everything at home, Doc? I'm from Kansas, and got in four months before the Boshches got me. And say, Doc, for God's sake, have you got an American cigarette?" He was a Frenchman running a farm in Kansas, and enlisted last fall. His shout upon receiving a real Fatima that I brought over here did me good. He had a shell wound of the thigh with the bone sticking out, but knew the value of a Fatima in France. No one but the French would have thought to make such a place attractive. There were flowers everywhere and in place of trying to partition off the big shed, they had simply erected portable houses, brightly painted and serving admirably. These were arranged around a little "square," in the center of which were braziers of coals, as the day was chilly, and the poor devils, in their tattered coats, and bloody faces, drinking hot soup, and smoking the eternal cigarettes, was a great sight. We came back with 12 Fords filled, each carrying three "blesses." It was a very inspiring sight to see the fortitude and placidity of these wonderful Frenchmen, putting up with anything suggested by the commanding officers of the station, and eternally saluting and smiling, and "Bon jour M'sieur-ing." They are a great people.

BY RAIL TO MEAUX.

The most interesting day I have spent outside the hospital was at Meaux, with Dr. Greenough and a couple of us. We left Paris in the morning and went by rail to Meaux, where we were lucky enough to find an old Delahaye limousine, and an English-speaking chauffeur. We covered in all 65 miles up and down the old lines of the battlefield of the Marne, the most sensational fight in all history. It was here the hastily mobilized and green French army demonstrated to the world that the splendid "machine" of V. Kluck was not only not invincible, but capable of doing the 2.20 in record time—back the way they came. The Germans fought desperately, and for three days the losses were frightful, but the little Frenchmen shoved them back 50 miles, and although the "contemptible little army" of General French did much to turn the tide for the allies, still the French deserve the major part of the credit. We passed through Meaux, Chambrey, Etrepilly, Etavigny, Trocy, Acy-en-Multien, Puisseaux, and a dozen hamlets, following the German line of retreat. I have written this up pretty well in my notes, so will only hit in the high places at this time. Owing to the tremendous number of impressions received, and the miscellaneous information I picked up, it is hard to write it concisely, but here goes for a try.

KEEN FOR "THE TOMMIES."

Due to the English having practically saved Meaux, on the second day of the fight, the inhabitants of this pretty little place are naturally pretty keen for the "Tommies." Unfortunately, our uniform, the regulation French Red Cross uniform, is almost identical with the English officers'—which, added to our talking English, produced considerable excitement. Small boys yelled after us, "Vive L'Anglais," etc. I was somewhat embarrassed, as it seemed unfair somehow, but as Dr. Greenough said "you can't be in the English army every day, and we didn't design the uniforms." Hence I tried to give what I supposed was a Lord Kitchener return to the salutes. All of these towns are garrisoned, so we were kept busy saluting. Dr. Greenough is a very striking looking man, and makes a fine appearance in his uniform, so naturally the soldiers thought he was a big gun out inspecting the lines with his staff. (I wasn't such a bad figure of a subaltern myself.) But I could never get used to these splendid big cuirasseurs stiffening up and saluting; while I stalk by, wondering if I saluted with my off hand or not. They are the big chaps with the steel helmets, and horse hair tails hanging down.

FIRST LINE OF TRENCHES.

Just out of Chambrey, we found the first line of French trenches, hastily built to check the German advance. There were not more than three feet in height, but seemed to have served their purpose. Just behind and across the road was a cemetery wall, pierced with holes for the muzzles of the French mitrailleuse, which did such terrific slaughter in the German lines. They each fire 800 per minute, and they must have 50 of them. I took some pictures here of a gutter pipe on the wall, showing the terrific fire this spot was subjected to. Each of the above mentioned towns presented the same picture—houses tumbled into the street, churches smashed, and always the swarms of polite and charming little French children climbing about the ruins. These particularly impressed me. They were so friendly, and not the least shy or self-conscious. They tried hard not to laugh at my French. The most impressive sight of the day was the hundreds, and I might say thousands, of graves that we passed for miles and miles. Each French grave with its little tricolor and flowers, and each German with its little wooden cross and stenciled "Allenmande" and flowers—always the flowers. These fields were all under cultivation and very green and fresh looking. One could hardly visualize the scene of a few months ago. About 15 miles from Meaux we passed along the historic mile of poplar lined road (my idea of France.") so well described by R. H. Davis in his "With the Allies" (page 106, I think.) Here the trees two and three feet in diameter at the base were literally shot off, and still lie sprawled in the ditches. The limbs hanging down looked very much like the blazes we made as kids in Cashiers, to mark a trial, only these twigs were 18 inches in diameter. Many unexploded shells still appear high up, imbedded in the trunks, and others passed through two feet of live wood, leaving holes as smooth and round as if made with an augur. For a mile the trunks at the height of a man's head were "fuzzy" from the frightful rifle and machine gun fire that raged here for 48 hours. I saw dozens of the red French caps in the ditches and fields. Here and there a gray German overcoat, or what was left of it, showed as a reminder of that awful day. It is reported that 2,000 men were killed in this mile of road those two days, and in one grave there lie over a thousand Germans killed in a wheat field 300 yards from the French machine guns (which were invented by an American and refused by our army.) Over this big grave a huge cross had been erected by bolting a 20-foot log blown from a poplar by a German shell, to the trunk it came from. At the foot were the inevitable flowers, placed there by the people the Germans came to wipe out. You can't beat the French. While I stood there an old priest came up the road, head uncovered, and passing the German grave, he stopped and mumbled a prayer. He then saluted us for several seconds, and walked off. Over a single grave, someone had spread a gray German overcoat, and there it has been since the fight. I wanted a German button, but not bad enough to take it here. I wonder how many women and children that big German grave means everything to. They will never know where those poor fellows lie, as the day was hot and unless a menace to their own health, the Germans ignore their dead. Hence the French buried them, and helter skelter, as hot weather was not over, and they had no time to catalogue the little zinc numbers attached to each man's wrist. But after all, that's a small matter. They are "missing," and that word serves to keep hope going, and perhaps it helps—I don't know.

A WORD AS TO TRENCHES.

I could go on and on, and tell much of inspecting the new trenches Joffre is digging across France, but I must stop somewhere. However, a word as to the trenches. These are wonderfully constructed, and built for five years. Owing to our uniforms we got down in them, and took pictures ad lib. Standing in the trench as it is now built, my eyes were about 15 inches below the edge. By standing on a shelf, I could just see over—so how these Frenchmen expect to, I can't say. The walls give my shoulders about 12 inches on either side, and are covered with willow osiers "wicker work," to prevent washing. The floors are paved with gravel and with corduroy, beautifully made, so these will be no more standing in water. They are well drained. At intervals of 20 feet the trench turns about a heavily logged abuttment, which was not present in the first trenches built, and enabled the Germans to pour a flanking fire down a trench "enfilade" with terrific slaughter. This practically obviates that. Shelters are scattered here and there and very "comfy." Underground passages connect with other trenches, and with the "75" ("75" is the name for the French field guns—means 75 mm. diaimeter at muzzle) gun stands 200 yards in the rear. These pass under the roads where necessary. All in hope they naver have to use them. But the Germans simply can't take them. In addition, there is a 50-yard wide barbed wire entanglement running down the entire length of the trenches, so how man or beast could get through I don't see. Add to this the 75's mitrailleause and rifles, and you have a strong team. But enough. We returned to Paris about night.

The work here is going on pretty much the same as I wrote of in my last letter, so will save this up for my next. We still get a preponderance of head cases, and Cushing has done some very dramatic and wondetrful tnings. For instance, he pulled a bit of shell casing from the brain through the use of a big electric magnet, after of course opening the skull in the usual manner. I'll write of this later, as it is too much to start on now.

HOSPITAL VAN.

You will all be interested to hear that a big auto van hospital has been shipped to us from America, some ten big vans in all, and with accommodations for 100 men, complete operating room, X-ray, etc., etc. This can be moved in a day, and will go direct to the front. Dr. Greenough has been urged to take it over, but for many reasons is undecided. It would leave this place without its chief, and besides he has four little children. There is some red tape at present with the army, so the personnel is unknown, but if I get a half chance I'm going. However, this is all in the air now, as it will take a month to organize and equip. Dr. Strong telegraphed us from Serbia last week, and Greenough told me if I wanted to go he might arrange to let me off a little later, but advised me strongly not to go. But it's not in my line, and I decided not to do it.

I dined with Dr. Du Bourchet, the surgeon-in-chief of the ambulance hospital, here.

One thing that impressed me there was the ease with which the entire family switched from their own Russian to English. This included them all down to a 16-year-old boy. It makes me ashamed. Here we are, from Harvard and supposed to be educated," I suppose, and not a man-jack in the crowd, including Cushing, can do more than ask "Do you sell stamps here?" There's something rotten about it all. Dr. Greenough speaks Canadian French like a streak, so gets about perfectly well, but as Miss Du Bourchet confided to me, it is "ter'ble Franch."

We Second the Motion.

In 1916 the North Carolina newspaper editors will be invited to meet with the Carolinians and for the gathering there is no better place than Chick Springs.

Doubtless divers hospitable cities will crave the attendance of the Carolinians, but they can wait until the North Carolinians have been square mealed, so to say, and for the operation Chick Springs has facilities of exceptional merit.

We move, Brethren, here and now, in order to cut off rancorous, cantankerous and prolix debate, that the Carolinians assemble for a third time, in 1916, under the wing of old Colonel Tom Arnold at Chick-Springs-on-the-Inter-Urban and invite the North Carolinians to assemble, peaceably, there with them.

There is no other way that will as surely make the North Carolinians both wise and happy.—The State.